

From Granny Goldie & Aunt Tib,  
I think?

(We are planning to go East at the  
month - I suppose now - about nothing is  
but found this  
Please write to me  
copy has been made  
Mother tells me your  
movements

437  
L. E. H.  
Lynsey



My dear Theresa

Ayr, Ont.,

Oct. 6th, 1914.

I started for Montreal on the 22nd, of Sept., en route for Valcartier, reaching there in time for breakfast with Bob and Jean Neilson. Jean and I left for Quebec by the 1.30 train, getting there about 6 o'clock. Mr. Green a friend of George's was waiting for us to convey us to the Chateau Frontenac. He was most kind, having procured our rooms and arranged everything for us. A wire from Crosby was waiting for us, saying that he would call us by 'phone later on, but that we were to leave for Valcartier next morning by the 9.30 train and he would be waiting for us. No 'phone came, owing to overcrowding and in the waiting we had dinner. You who have been to the Chateau know what that means, a grand affair. We watched the crowd, which was intensely interesting, officers of all kinds, good looking men; the Highlanders winning out in my estimation, fashionably dressed women, all going and coming, conversing or chattering as the case might be, with the clank of spurs amid it all, little pages running here and there with wire messages, bells ringing, bell boys alert and anxious, porters carrying baggage in and out, important looking dames, the gay laughter of girls and gray haired men seriously reading the papers, which were giving good reasons for all the stir and excitement at the Chateau at this time of the year. War! Nothing but War! is in the spirit of the people. We took a view of the city, all light up, which was a great sight from such a height. Large crowds promenaded the Great Terrace and seemed gripped by the atmosphere of it all just like ourselves. You felt that some great moving force was stirring the hearts of the people. No 'phone call came, so retired at a late hour to our beds, very tired and awe struck with the thought that if here in Canada we can be so stirred by present events what will the Mother Country be. How cruel war is, separating husband and wife, mother from son, and sister from brother, and strange as it may seem all are of one mind, that we must face the situation and carry it out to the bitter end and liberty against force must ultimately win.

We got away next morning for Valcartier, many soldiers and such as we were filling the dirty train of the C.N.R. The day was cloudy with showers now and then. At the station was a swarm of people, but out of the tangle came that square jawed but good natured face of



our boy. He was in full regimentals and a military coat to his heels. It made my heart thump and ache to look at him.

Well we got out of the mess and found a double seated rig, in which we set out to the camp, which was not far. We saw a large group of tents to our right, which Crosby said was the Army Service Corps. Their duty is to feed the army. Before I go farther I must tell you that Crosby is second in command of the Divisional Ammunition Park, which consists of Ammunition Motor Trucks, and motors for the officers and when on the march it is two miles and a half long. It is hard work for the men, though not so dangerous as the firing line. They feed the guns. We then came to the ridge from which we had a good view of the whole camp and though over cast and dull it was an inspiring scene. There it lay before you, the broad valley at your feet with a back ground of hills with rich autumn colors, which were to be glorified by the sun next day. I wish I could draw you a sketch of the camp, but I am not good at that. You will understand when I tell you that there is a main street with parallel streets, just like Spadina and Church with Yonge in the centre. On each side of the main street are the kitchens of the several divisions. Behind them are large tents with open ends. The name of each division is marked at the cross roads by a board stuck up on a post. There are two hydrants to each kitchen and two tubes for garbage and litter. This is burned during the morning. Stands about nine feet long are for the use of the men to wash themselves. They have basins. I saw that the streets were well provided with electric lights. There is a ditch around each tent and these lead to broader ones that take the rain from the surface. Each tent holds eight men, sleeping with feet to the pole; each man having a rubber sheet and a pair of blankets. They tell me they are quite comfortable, feeling clean and trig and each man's kit in its place rolled up for the day, the lower flaps of the tents open for airing. Officers' tents are on Church and Spadina with Red Cross Tents every few cross roads. They away to the right were the light guns and to the left the heavy guns. On the crest that we came over were the hospitable tents, which were hidden by a knoll. These we did not go near, for I had many boys to hunt up, Sandy McPherson, Constantine and Young, all R.M.C. boys, also Will Thomson and George Ryerson, who I failed to see.

As Crosby had to be on duty at noon, we made tracks for the station about 12 O'clock to go to St. Joseph's Hotel five miles farther on. It was raining slightly but nothing daunted came a bunch of soldiers towards us. They were all kinds, a little kiltie leading them and singing with great gusto "It is a Long Way to Tipperary". He must have seen my amused look for he stopped short, saluted and cried "Hello Ma". Every man looked bright and confident; he was there because he wanted to be. Crosby got us on board the train for St. Joseph's, saying that he and Sandy would take dinner and spend the evening with us.



We reached the hotel, which was quite near the station. It is a beautiful spot on a lake dotted with islands, much like Muskoka. It is a summer hotel and closes in August but to serve the camp kept open a month longer. The less we say about it, the better, it was not the Chateau. I was feeling very depressed, everything tending to keep me so, so I went out to get away by myself for a little while and in my wanderings I came to the back of the hotel, which faces the lake and there I stood thinking and weighted down with the horrors of our war, when my eyes rested on an ash heap, piled up among the trees that are around that part of the house and stuck on the top was a rude board with these words printed on it "The German Empire". We should thank God for a sense of humour, for I found myself laughing heartily and running in to get Jean to come and see the joke. Bless the lad who prophesied in his own rude way, for it broke the dark mood I was in and gave me hope. How contagious it is! For my boy's sake I was bright when he came, not bringing Sandy but Will Thomson. Sandy was busy getting his men and guns ready for moving out. What a pleasant time we had that night with each other. We were introduced to many of the boys and their friends, and all too soon came the call "train for Valcartier", but we knew we had another day so brightly said goodnight.

After they were gone Jean and I were sitting up stairs warming ourselves before we went to bed, when we heard a baby crying. Then a door was pushed open and out came an officer with a little baby two months old, hushing him to sleep. It was a pathetic sight. I went up to him and asked him if I could help him. He said "no thank you, I want to do it. Poor wee chap he will not know his father". I said God grant he may know and call you father. "Amen was whispered". He was a major and his wife had come from Winnipeg to say goodbye and show him his baby. He told me that his brother - in - law was Crosby's head officer, Major Bell, and that his sister was in the hotel. Shortly after we were introduced to Mrs. Bell and his wife. Both were sweet and gentle women. The men are of the regulars. Another said case I came across; a young woman was sitting alone and no one seemed to know her. She looked so sad I spoke to her and found that she had just been married two months when her husband was called to the colors. She seemed distracted but was comforting herself that she had been accepted as a Red Cross Nurse and would not have the ocean between them. Poor, lassie her lot was a sad one.

Next morning we were delighted to find that the day promised to be bright. We women spent the morning talking over the situation and the spirit of the men at Valcartier camp and strengthened each other in our desire that we should not break when we said our last goodbyes. The boys dreaded it, for some mothers made sad scenes, being hysterical.

After we had lunch we started for the camp. The sun shone brightly. We did not expect Crosby to meet us, as



we knew that all were on the move and every man at his job, so I got a very serious and fifteen year old boy with a one horse double seated rig and started for the camp. The sight of the camp is one never to be forgotten. It is five miles long with a back ground of hills in the glory of autumn colors. You could see horsemen going and coming, detachments marching everywhere, horses in bunches dashing across the open spaces and the great wide stretch of white peaked tents glistening in the sunlight, incessant action all around you and with the whistle, the lilt, the joke and the banter. To the eye and ear it was a gay holiday and for the moment I forgot it was grim war. Just then a sentry came forward asking for our pass. We showed it and then went down to the heart of the camp. Coming towards us at a brisk trot came an officer and his orderly. I remarked there is a man that sits his horse well, and who should it be but Will Thomsen. He at once offered his services as guide. He is pay master of the 3rd, Artillery Brigade and had time at his disposal, not like Crosby who was hard at work getting his supplies ready for his men. Both are captains and have their own body servants. Will told us his men were all in marching order, waiting for the word of command. Also that several divisions had left the night before and he might be ordered out at any moment. We considered ourselves fortunate to have his guidance. We really traversed the whole camp. We went straight to Crosby's tent, but as we expected he was not there. We sat in his tent for sometime hoping he would come. His tent was perfection of order; they told me the best outfitted in the whole camp. His orderly is a decent sport and he came in with a pair of clean boots and a coat neatly folded. I found out that Crosby and Sandy McPherson had arranged to come to us in the evening; hence the extra preparation. We rested there for half an hour and watched a lot of the boys get their belts. They were called by number, not by name. How happy and good natured they looked and I wondered if I was right in saying "poor chaps" for they did look so happy.

Captain Thomsen then took us to see a Pontoon bridge flung across the river in four hours and a half. It was a wonderful piece of work. He then took us to his own tent and gave us a cup of tea, after which we watched the gun men get their horses' suppers. How fond they seemed to be of them. Boys and horses were fine specimens and seemed full of life and go. We then parted from Will and I may say that I never saw him look better, he was so trig and dapper and full of content about his going.

We then made our way back to Crosby's division and found him getting off a pair of very muddy boots and into his togs to come to see us. As he dressed he told us that they were now all ready but the men's kits, which could be got ready in ten minutes after orders. Up came his superior officer, Major Bell, who I had been introduced to the previous evening; also his wife. I heard Crosby say "All ready Sir?". "Good" was the answer. Then turning to



me the major said, I consider myself well off with such a helper. I said "I am glad". He then told me that Crosby had been sent to him to look over and in four hours he said I found I had what I wanted. The Major looks like iron, he is so dark and hard. Crosby tells me that a finer bunch of men could not be, then they have control over.

Well we got away from the camp, taking many a long backward glance at the camp with its thirty thousand men and the hills with the setting sun made a glorious picture, long to be remembered. I found my heart going up to God who rules the destinies of nations and asking him to keep me in that faith and then I found myself saying as my boy had said "there is no other human way, than we are taking and we must bear the consequences and let God be our judge".

Crosby and Sandy had dinner with us, then came the talk around the cobble stone fire place with many fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers, knowing well we might never see each other again, yet brave through it all. Then we broke up into little groups, feeling we must have our last precious word with each other. Then came the call for the men for Valcartier camp; hustling, bustling, cheery call, passing joke, things such as smoothing a wrinkle in a coat, and handing a cane to some one. The door was opened. We said our quiet goodbyes and out they went into the dark night and to what "The Unknown with God overhead".